

Appleby Archaeology

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Romans in North Cumbria

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The archaeology of Cumbria is everywhere but over the years the activity has centred on "The Wall". In the last 20 yrs much more interest in Carlisle.

Evidence of Roman Carlisle

Early 70's finds around Botchergate A6 indicated that there was a sizeable settlement and that Carlisle may have been the civitates, regional administrative centre. The native people were the Carvetii. The first note of the Roman name for Carlisle Luguvalium, from the Celtic god was in 80AD ten years after they first arrived this suggest that there was an iron age fort there

1970's-1990's excavations have confirmed this view.

1. Beneath the Castle Roman Fort, south side has been located;
2. Under Marks and Spencer buildings, and a street network;

The Romans arrived 72-73. The ground conditions are such that wood preservation has been good eg a wood sill of oak 20ft long was found, this has enabled very accurate dating. Sections through the ramparts clearly show a layer of logs then turfs, then repeated layers of logs, turf beautifully preserved.

3. Castle Street annex to the Fort indications are that this was a repair maintenance and stocking depot, the wattle work of alder stands in places 18" high erected in 94

4. Lanes area 2 substantial buildings praetorium 100m long, and a ?temple or more likely a mansio, a stopping of place for dignitaries dated to end of 1st century/early 2nd, at this time Carlise was a military base. The fort was in use in the 3rd and 4th centuries but the praetorium and mansio were not used as long and it may be that the Romans demolished (them signs of fire).

5. 3-4thC evidence of stone foundations, artisan houses and shops, bath house in Scotch Street and hypocausts systems all point to Carlise being an important place large and populace.

6. Findings in pits of the scapula of cattle with a hole in each bone indicate a meat source which had been smoked. The cattle were small in height cf Dexter Bull ?Celtic Short Horn. Because so little is known about Cumbria pre the Romans we do not know if the cattle were from the locality or driven to it. Sheep were small cf poodle and were not a major food source as was pork. The Romans did not use local resources eg game fish. The wheat grown was spelt. There is evidence of the primary

processing of grain on the rural site and of secondary processing in the town. (Evidence of early ploughing pre Roman has been found under the counter scarp on the north side of the ditch along The Wall).

The Romans it is calculated used a 100 cubic meters of oak for the ramparts alone, therefore a colossal amount of timber was cut, plus the alder for the wattle indicates that the woodland of the valleys was decimated, the alder was in fact unplanned coppicing.

Evidence of Anglo Saxon Carlisle very difficult to find there is evidence eg in Castle Street 8th century Oak lined pit nearby stood the Monastery of St Cuthbert. Excavation near the cathedral show a long sequence of finds, Romans -> 11th century with a Viking age cemetery under the cathedral 3 phases -> 10th C (A church would have serviced the cemetery which ties in with the subsequent building of the cathedral on that site.

Medieval Carlisle there are no waterlogged remains. Many lanes and stone buildings have been excavated to reveal the townscape. A series of pit complexes some lined suggest that a tannery was within the town this is unusual because of the smell!

In the 70's when the lanes were being demolished effectively destroying 1900 years of history, some lanes were Roman in origin, many medieval not to mention the Victorian slums. A detailed record of the buildings eg drawings, was made and historical record written.

Outside the City work is beginning to reveal the pre roman history with evidence of neolithic bronze and iron age buildings and field systems (Burgh by Sands , Durrant Hill 2-3km west of Carlisle there is huge complex going back to the neolithic age, names within the field names!)

Millenium Project is to link the Tullie museum with the Castle examining the city defences and South gate.